

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

AID-05 EB-07 CIEP-01 TRSE-00 STR-04 OMB-01 CEA-01

COME-00 AGR-05 DEAE-00 IO-10 JUSE-00 SNM-02 OES-03

/095 W

----- 024447

R 240628Z JUN 75

FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2102

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT SNAR NP

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT CRITICIZED AT PANCHAYAT SESSION

REF: KATHMANDU 2614

1. SUMMARY: 26TH SESSION OF NATIONAL PANCHAYAT OPENED JUNE 16 AND SO FAR HAS PROVED TO BE ROUGH GOING FOR GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER RIJAL. ALTHOUGH PRIMARY PURPOSE OF SESSION IS TO APPROVE BUDGET AND BROAD OUTLINES OF FIVE YEAR PLAN, POLITICAL REFORMS AND WORKINGS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMISSION HAVE BEEN DOMINANT THEMES OF DEBATE SO FAR. END SUMMARY.

2. KING BIRENDRA'S ADDRESS TO THE PANCHAYAT JUNE 16 WAS A RATHER BLAND CATALOGUE OF PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE AND FAILED TO PROVIDE SPECIFIC REMEDIES FOR A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT ISSUES FACING THE COUNTRY. A NUMBER OF MEMBERS (WHO REMAIN UNIDENTIFIED SINCE SESSIONS OF THE PANCHAYAT ARE CLOSED) HAVE CRITICIZED THE SPEECH IN FAIRLY

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STRONG TERMS AS BEING UNRESPONSIVE TO THE NATION'S NEEDS AND

OVERLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE FIVE YEAR PLAN. SPECIFICALLY, THEY HAVE CHARGED THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS UNABLE TO GRAPPLE WITH ECONOMIC PROBLEMS SUCH AS THE RECENT PRICE HIKES IN BASIC COMMODITIES AND HAS FAILED TO DEVISE AN EQUITABLE SYSTEM TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE RICE TRADE. IT WAS ALSO NOTED THAT THE KING'S ADDRESS OMITTED MENTION OF HIS PROPOSAL, ANNOUNCED AT THE CORONATION IN FEBRUARY, TO INTRODUCE FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

3. ON EVE OF SESSION RIJAL GOVERNMENT TRIED TO PLACATE PANCHAYAT BY ANNOUNCING IT WOULD SHELVE PLANS TO BUILD "SUMMER RESIDENCE" FOR PRIME MINISTER, A \$200,000 EXPENDITURE THAT VIRTUALLY EVERYONE RECOGNIZED AS AN INDEFENSIBLE LUXURY. ONE NEWSPAPER (ARATI) HAS SUGGESTED THAT LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN RIJAL LEADERSHIP COULD RESULT IN VOTE OF CENSURE BY PANCHAYAT, A SUGGESTION WHICH SO FAR HAS ONLY RESULTED IN THE FORMATION OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER A BREACH OF PRIVILEGE SHOULD BE FILED AGAINST THE PAPER. CRITICISM OF THE PRIME MINISTER IS INDICATIVE OF THE MOOD OF THIS PANCHAYAT WHICH IS BEGINNING TO FLEX ITS POLITICAL MUSCLE AS A RESULT OF THE OPENNESS ENGENDERED IN THE SYSTEM BY THE DISCUSSIONS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMISSION.

4. IT IS CLEAR FROM PRESS REPORTS THAT A NUMBER OF PANCHAS ARE USING THE SESSION TO ARGUE FOR STRONG CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS, E.G., DIRECT ELECTIONS ON THE BASIS OF FULL ADULT FRANCHISE. OTHERS HAVE REACTED SWIFTLY TO SUGGESTIONS BY SOME GOVERNMENT MINISTERS (REFTEL) THAT ADVOCATES OF REFORM ARE AIDING THOSE WHO SEEK TO OVERTHROW THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM. THEY HAVE STATED THAT NO ONE SHOULD FEEL CONFINED BY GOVERNMENT THREAT FROM URGING HONEST REFORM.

5. WE UNDERSTAND THAT NARCOTICS LEGISLATION HAS ONCE AGAIN BEEN SHELVED AND WILL NOT BE INTRODUCED IN THE CURRENT SESSION, DESPITE PREVIOUS ASSURANCES THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE SERIOUS EFFORT TO OBTAIN CONSENT TO NEW DRAFT PREPARED THIS SPRING. ACCORDING TO DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PRIME MINISTER PERSONALLY DECIDED AGAINST INTRODUCTION OF BILL ON GROUNDS THAT FOCUS OF PANCHAYAT SHOULD BE ON BUDGET AND THAT NO "CONTROVERSIAL" LEGISLATION SHOULD BE PUT FORWARD AT THIS TIME. WHILE THERE MAY BE OTHER REASONS IT DOES APPEAR THAT NARCOTICS BILL HAS BECOME VICTIM OF GOVERNMENT'S UNWILLINGNESS TO PUSH PROGRAMS ON WHICH IT MIGHT BE SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED OR EVEN DEFEATED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, CENTRAL LEGISLATURE, MEETING REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 JUN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: greeneet
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975KATHMA02886
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750218-0822
From: KATHMANDU
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750622/aaaaatnt.tel
Line Count: 115
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 KATHMANDU 2614
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: greeneet
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 AUG 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <25 NOV 2003 by greeneet>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOVERNMENT CRITICIZED AT PANCHAYAT SESSION
TAGS: PINT, SNAR, NP
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006